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Rhetoric or reality: examining discourses within public policy on the the participation,
involvement and lifelong learning of older people using social care services through
documentary analysis. In: The 3rd European Conference for Social Work Research - ECSWR
2013, 20-22 Mar 2013, Jyväskylä, Finland. . [Conference or Workshop Item]

This version is available at: <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/12656/>

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KEY CONCEPTS



The Research Questions

1. Which discourses within public policy formulation are present on the participation, involvement and lifelong learning of older people using social care services?
2. What is the relevance of lifelong learning within the government's 'transformation' agenda for older people's services in relation to promoting self-directed care ?
3. How do older people experience opportunities for participation, involvement and learning in light of recent policy changes?
4. How effective is the process of accessing and personalising social care services for older people and how are their interests being served?

Study Design and Methods

A two tiered approach utilised qualitative research methods and interaction based methods of social inquiry to help understand and create meaning during the research process

1. Documentary analysis of four specific government public policies relevant to the research topic.

2. Individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty older people using social care services.

Primary practice data obtained from both service users and policy documents provided a different account of the theory-practice relationship and illustrated potential for deliberation within the research on how these different 'texts' provide a context for action given that they are characterised or influenced by authoritative and political rhetoric.

Documentary analysis involved positioning myself within any discursive structures emanating from public policy contexts in order to demystify the process of knowledge development . It also permitted critical examination of how discourses interacted with practices within older people's social care services and how these are constructed.

Discourse analysis was used to examine how social relations are inscribed within past and future actions implied within policies, and how 'readers' are encouraged to accept these as subjects or 'normal' positions of those involved, thus suppressing the ideological element. Juxtaposition of policy texts alongside primary interview data lent itself to a fuller discussion not least through the reflection of older people themselves, as potential recipients of policy implementation. This process utilised **theoretical frameworks** which engaged with Fairclough's (2000) work on language and power . **Habermas's theory of Communicative Action** was used to examine how government policies are **Espoused, Enacted** and **Experienced** in relation to older people .

Developing a Research Tool

Key criterion for selecting policies for analysis:

1. Policies that identified a paradigmatic shift towards citizen focussed approach and promotion of user participation (1997 – 2010)
2. Policies relevant to professional social work curriculum and practicum, and those explicitly concerned with reforms associated with self directed care and the transformation of services
3. Multidisciplinarity in the research area – policies whose aims and parameters concerned themselves more widely than with the structure and operation of services to older people using social care, i.e. those addressing lifelong learning. and social inclusion.

Seventeen policies met the broad inclusion criteria. A précis of each identified **four key policies** most relevant to the research topics and were selected for their content in relation to 'learning'; 'personalisation' or 'self-directed care'; 'participation'; 'user involvement' and 'social inclusion;.

Discourse analysis involved:

Rudimentary coding - the development of loose categories for analysis, using NVIVO initially, to develop three categories under which policy data was grouped in relation to what it said about older peoples 'learning/education'. 'user involvement and participation', 'transformation and self-directed care. This data was annotated further to look for the issues and themes associated with these categories, for example 'how learning was conceptualised ?' . Sub-coding was developed around specific issues such as 'learning needs' or 'learning opportunities' and 'technology'. I then went back and read the policies more holistically, to identify common themes crossing these for example – what was implied about the different partnerships involved ?and whether there was any cross referencing between learning and user involvement ? and so on. Credibility markers were identified and interrogated. Important to the analytic process was the identification of patterns of language use, ongoing reflection on ,and examination of, how everyday talk and practices construct and legitimize power, and service to reinforce or challenge views and action. The data derived from the documentary analysis enabled me to consider further evidence on how policy reflects the nature of the relationship between the government and older people, and how government manages these relationships and allocates resources to achieve its aims. It provided a method for contextualising and comparing with older people's own perspectives via individual interviews.

Key points from the overall analysis

1. Achieving stability in the measures used . Declaring specific interests concerning the orientation and conceptual framework of the research study was a challenge.
2. Having an understanding about how older peoples experiences are shaped by society's norms and its institutional arrangements were revealing and can give rise to formulaic approaches to how social workers work alongside service users.
3. Theorising policy by asking simple questions about the relationship between the processes and outcomes of social care modernisation requires establishing ethical communication and reflective processes when implementing policies such as self-directed care..